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Beau ideal

UF sets sustainability standard

In Tallahassee, where Seminoles and Rattlers predominate and Gators are more likely to be ridiculed than emulated, some might consider any excellent example set by the University of Florida as automatically suspect.

But loyalties and spirit aside, UF can rightfully claim to have set a standard that other universities - as well as local and state governments, especially in tandem with universities - should eagerly try to equal.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency last month named UF one of the best workplaces in the nation for commuters, one of only 72 colleges and universities in America that the federal agency considers innovative in its approach to transportation.

The EPA looked at such issues as air quality, energy conservation and reduction of traffic congestion. UF was the only university in Florida to make the list.

It was no accident, but rather the result of a commitment to principles of sustainability on campus. UF recently established an Office of Sustainability, whose purpose is to approach every aspect of university life and policies with an eye toward the environment and the economy.

More than 100 professors on campus have been recruited for their expertise on various aspects of sustainability. The goal is to make UF a "living laboratory" for a wide range of practices in which sustainable growth can be put into practice. These include building designs, purchasing policies and community outreach.

Quality-of-life issues

Very simply, putting sustainable policies into practice makes life better - regardless of one's favorite school colors.

Consider a few of UF's initiatives to encourage alternative modes of transportation, practices that local transportation planners and commissioners would be smart to incorporate in policies for our community and campuses:

A carpool program that rewards three-person carpools with free parking at convenient locations throughout campus. Two-person carpools receive a reduced rate for parking decals. It includes a free "emergency ride home" program.

Free use of the regional transit system, paid for by the UF administration, for all employees as well as students.

An extensive system of bike lanes and walking paths. UF, in collaboration with the city of Gainesville, helped pay for construction of off-campus sidewalks to encourage walking to campus.

In April, the men's basketball team at UF won the NCAA national championship - an exciting accomplishment worthy of emulation by any university with a major basketball program.

The university's sustainability standards may not generate the same kind of fan appeal. But in their efforts to improve campus and community life, our local universities and local and state governments would do well to borrow a page from the Gator nation.
